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British officer: Ray bragged about slaying Dr. King

By Daniel F. Gilmore

WASHINGTON (UPI) — A British policeman has given possibly the most damning testimony yet that James Earl Ray killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., claiming Ray said he was "quite proud" of having assassinated the civil rights leader.

Alexander Anthony Eist, a retired British police officer, said in a written statement submitted last Friday to the House Assassinations Committee that Ray told him in a London prison he hated blacks, killed King and had done it so cleverly that he could never be convicted of anything but participation in a conspiracy.

"During the course of conversation, he definitely — he didn't actually come out with it — but it was there in the conversation that he had done it." Eist said in a statement read by Rep. Samuel Devine, R - Ohio. "He was quite proud of it."

Eist said Ray confided his only mistake was to leave behind the murder weapon — bearing his fingerprints, but expressed confidence this would not be enough to sustain a murder conviction.

"The only thing the state. . . would be able to pin on him was a conspiracy because they couldn't actually prove that he fired the gun because, according to him, nobody saw him," Eist said. "He was quite open about this situation, a conspiracy."

Eist said there wasn't any doubt about Ray's feelings toward blacks.

"He just hated black people," Eist said. "He said so on many occasions."

(In an interview Friday with CBS - TV in England, Eist was asked if Ray left any doubt in the police officer's mind that he had killed Dr. King and was proud of it. "None at all," the 28 - year police veteran replied, adding Ray left no doubt he had "acted alone.")

After bitter exchanges concerning Eist's credibility, the panel excused Ray from further testimony until November, when it will pick up this thread of its assassination probe.

Ray Coolly and flatly denied he ever discussed the case with Eist, identified as the man who guarded him continuously for weeks after his arrest in England.

Mark Lane, Ray's attorney, introduced counter - evidence designed to destroy Eist's credibility.

Accusing the committee of "outrageous" and "irresponsible" action, Lane said he had information Eist had been "dismissed in disgrace" from the British force for a variety of crimes, including perjury and inventing confessions from prisoners.

Committee leaders let Lane's allegations pass without contradiction — saying only they were "checking" on Eist — but read into the public record the policeman's allegations.

After Ray and Lane had departed, the panel called Ray's star alibi witness, Dean Cowden of Port Neches, Texas, to the witness stand.

In attempting to buttress his client's claim he did not kill Dr. King and was not present at the murder scene, Lane had told the panel Cowden and another man, now dead, had told him they saw Ray at a Memphis service station about the time of the April 4, 1968, murder.

"This story is completely false," Cowden testified Friday.

He said he was actually home in Port Neches the day Dr. King was killed and had merely agreed to tell the concocted alibi-corroboration story as a favor to a friend who had done investigative work for one of Ray's earlier defense attorneys.

The objective, Cowden said, was to use the story to "sell movie rights, a book. . . several things he was trying to market."

As for Lane, Cowden said, "He fell for it hook, line and sinker."